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Win race in space or face blackmail, Weinberger warns

By Ted Agres
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The world would be subjected to "Soviet political blackmail" if Moscow succeeds in beating the United States to space with a deployed strategic defense system, Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger said.

"Imagine the world situation if they [the Soviets] made a breakthrough, and we were the ones whose missiles had been rendered obsolete," Mr. Weinberger said.

"The whole world would suddenly become vulnerable to Soviet political blackmail. And I cannot imagine that the Soviets, if they had a monopoly position, would do anything other than try to blackmail the rest of the world," he said.

In an interview with Arnaud de Borchgrave, the editor-in-chief of

The Washington Times, Mr. Weinberger said that great concern has been expressed by other nations following the House of Representatives' failure to pass \$14 million in aid for Nicaraguan resistance to the Marxist Sandinista government in Managua.

But, the defense secretary said with emphasis, it is "vitally important" that U.S. allies and enemies "not misunderstand or misread the United States, not make any miscalculations based on faulty assumptions" following the congressional action.

"I know that in the event of anything that is demonstrably danger-

ous to our security, as Nicaragua is, our national will is not going to falter," Mr. Weinberger stated.

Regarding the U.S. effort to develop the Strategic Defense Initiative — dubbed "star wars" — Mr. Weinberger said Moscow has been engaged in a "propaganda line that intelligent people swallow hook, line and missile."

"SDI is not an arms race, nor an arm, nor even a weapon. It's a harmless means of destroying weapons," he said.

The administration has requested \$3.7 billion in funding for research on SDI this year. Last week the House Armed Services Committee voted to cut that amount by a third, to \$2.5 billion. The Senate Armed Services Committee has reduced the request by only about \$300 million.

Mr. Weinberger said President Reagan is "determined that we will not trade away strategic defense, we will not stop our research on it, or anything of the kind, regardless of circumstances. It's a vital part of our ability to defend the nation and friends and allies and freedom in the future," he said. "It is an irreversible process."

He said the Soviets have been engaged in a massive propaganda effort to stop U.S. development of SDI.

"I think it's very significant that the Soviet propaganda effort, their disinformation campaigns, their negotiating posture, every effort you can think of, are all focused on destroying SDI," Mr. Weinberger said.

"They're pulling out all the stops to convince the world and a lot of elements in our own public opinion that everything will be all right if only we stop our SDI research and any discussion of it."

The reason, he added, "is all too obvious."

"It's because they have a heavy concentration of offensive weapons which would be effectively countered by SDI," Mr. Weinberger also said that Moscow is "well along on

the research and the work necessary to secure such a system, and they obviously want to be alone in that field."

A new CIA report states that many Soviet scientists who have been quoted in the Western media as being critical of U.S. space weapons research have been leading the Soviet Union's own directed-energy weapons program.

Yevgeniy Velikhov, vice president of the U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences, is described in the CIA report as a "central figure" in Soviet laser- and particle-beam weapons research.

But in a Washington Post opinion article from last June, Mr. Velikhov wrote that strategic defense is "a dream that can't come true."

Mr. Weinberger said that Congress' "attempt to cut and recut" the administration's \$3.7 billion budget request "shows that Soviet propaganda is having an impact."

"We must have a very intensive application of our resources to this problem. I think if we get that, we can succeed. And, as a result, it will be a much safer world," he said.

On other topics, the defense secretary said:

- The congressional vote for a defense spending freeze "is very good news for the new Soviet leadership, bad news for the U.S."

- Congress' failure to pass \$14 million in non-lethal aid to the Nicaraguan freedom fighters only demonstrates a U.S. "lack of resolve" that Soviet leaders may seek to exploit "by stepping up their propaganda and disinformation efforts."

- There exists far more public support for SDI than is generally recognized.

- "The essence of deterrence is to have retaliatory capability. The question, however, is what are the circumstances under which it's properly used." If the cause and objective are clearly understood by the American public, "then the nation will rally."

- The Soviets "love to fish in troubled waters; they love to set up bases and means of operating very close to our borders." But, he said, "one Cuba's enough."